

FORM PTO-1390 (Modified) (REV 11-2000)		U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE		ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER
TRANSMITTAL LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES DESIGNATED/ELECTED OFFICE (DO/EO/US) CONCERNING A FILING UNDER 35 U.S.C. 371				221021US0PCT
INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO. PCT/EP00/09150		INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE 18 September 2000		U.S. APPLICATION NO. (IF KNOWN, SEE 37 CFR 10/088085
				PRIORITY DATE CLAIMED 24 September 1999
TITLE OF INVENTION PROCESS FOR RECYCLING ARTICLES BASED ON VINYL POLYMERS				
APPLICANT(S) FOR DO/EO/US Bernard VANDENHENDE et al.				
Applicant herewith submits to the United States Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) the following items and other information:				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This is a FIRST submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371. 2. <input type="checkbox"/> This is a SECOND or SUBSEQUENT submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371. 3. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This is an express request to begin national examination procedures (35 U.S.C. 371(f)). The submission must include items (5), (6), (9) and (24) indicated below. 4. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The US has been elected by the expiration of 19 months from the priority date (Article 31). 5. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A copy of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371 (c) (2)) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <input type="checkbox"/> is attached hereto (required only if not communicated by the International Bureau). b. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> has been communicated by the International Bureau. c. <input type="checkbox"/> is not required, as the application was filed in the United States Receiving Office (RO/US). 6. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An English language translation of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2)). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> is attached hereto. b. <input type="checkbox"/> has been previously submitted under 35 U.S.C. 154(d)(4). 7. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amendments to the claims of the International Application under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371 (c)(3)) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <input type="checkbox"/> are attached hereto (required only if not communicated by the International Bureau). b. <input type="checkbox"/> have been communicated by the International Bureau. c. <input type="checkbox"/> have not been made; however, the time limit for making such amendments has NOT expired. d. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> have not been made and will not be made. 8. <input type="checkbox"/> An English language translation of the amendments to the claims under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3)). 9. <input type="checkbox"/> An oath or declaration of the inventor(s) (35 U.S.C. 371 (c)(4)). 10. <input type="checkbox"/> An English language translation of the annexes to the International Preliminary Examination Report under PCT Article 36 (35 U.S.C. 371 (c)(5)). 11. <input type="checkbox"/> A copy of the International Preliminary Examination Report (PCT/IPEA/409). 12. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A copy of the International Search Report (PCT/ISA/210). 				
Items 13 to 20 below concern document(s) or information included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An Information Disclosure Statement under 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98. 14. <input type="checkbox"/> An assignment document for recording. A separate cover sheet in compliance with 37 CFR 3.28 and 3.31 is included. 15. <input type="checkbox"/> A FIRST preliminary amendment. 16. <input type="checkbox"/> A SECOND or SUBSEQUENT preliminary amendment. 17. <input type="checkbox"/> A substitute specification. 18. <input type="checkbox"/> A change of power of attorney and/or address letter. 19. <input type="checkbox"/> A computer-readable form of the sequence listing in accordance with PCT Rule 13ter.2 and 35 U.S.C. 1.821 - 1.825. 20. <input type="checkbox"/> A second copy of the published international application under 35 U.S.C. 154(d)(4). 21. <input type="checkbox"/> A second copy of the English language translation of the international application under 35 U.S.C. 154(d)(4). 22. <input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of Mailing by Express Mail 23. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other items or information: 				
Notice of Priority/ Form PTO-1449 Drawings (1 sheet)				

U.S. APPLICATION NO. (IF KNOWN, SEE 37 CFR 10/088085	INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO. PCT/EP00/09150	ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER 221021US0PCT																
24. The following fees are submitted:		CALCULATIONS PTO USE ONLY																
BASIC NATIONAL FEE (37 CFR 1.492 (a) (1) - (5)) : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Neither international preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) nor international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2)) paid to USPTO and International Search Report not prepared by the EPO or JPO \$1040.00 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) not paid to USPTO but International Search Report prepared by the EPO or JPO \$890.00 <input type="checkbox"/> International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) not paid to USPTO but international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2)) paid to USPTO \$740.00 <input type="checkbox"/> International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) paid to USPTO but all claims did not satisfy provisions of PCT Article 33(1)-(4) \$710.00 <input type="checkbox"/> International preliminary examination fee (37 CFR 1.482) paid to USPTO and all claims satisfied provisions of PCT Article 33(1)-(4) \$100.00 																		
ENTER APPROPRIATE BASIC FEE AMOUNT =		\$890.00																
Surcharge of \$130.00 for furnishing the oath or declaration later than months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492 (e)).		<input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 30 \$130.00																
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 15%;">CLAIMS</th> <th style="width: 25%;">NUMBER FILED</th> <th style="width: 25%;">NUMBER EXTRA</th> <th style="width: 25%;">RATE</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Total claims</td> <td>- 20 =</td> <td>0</td> <td>x \$18.00 \$0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Independent claims</td> <td>- 3 =</td> <td>0</td> <td>x \$84.00 \$0.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Multiple Dependent Claims (check if applicable).</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;">\$0.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		CLAIMS	NUMBER FILED	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE	Total claims	- 20 =	0	x \$18.00 \$0.00	Independent claims	- 3 =	0	x \$84.00 \$0.00	Multiple Dependent Claims (check if applicable).		<input type="checkbox"/>	\$0.00	
CLAIMS	NUMBER FILED	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE															
Total claims	- 20 =	0	x \$18.00 \$0.00															
Independent claims	- 3 =	0	x \$84.00 \$0.00															
Multiple Dependent Claims (check if applicable).		<input type="checkbox"/>	\$0.00															
TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =		\$1,020.00																
<input type="checkbox"/> Applicant claims small entity status. See 37 CFR 1.27). The fees indicated above are reduced by 1/2.		\$0.00																
SUBTOTAL =		\$1,020.00																
Processing fee of \$130.00 for furnishing the English translation later than months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR 1.492 (f)).		<input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 + \$0.00																
TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =		\$1,020.00																
Fee for recording the enclosed assignment (37 CFR 1.21(h)). The assignment must be accompanied by an appropriate cover sheet (37 CFR 3.28, 3.31) (check if applicable).		<input type="checkbox"/> \$0.00																
TOTAL FEES ENCLOSED =		\$1,020.00																
		Amount to be: refunded \$ charged \$																
a. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A check in the amount of \$1,020.00 to cover the above fees is enclosed.																		
b. <input type="checkbox"/> Please charge my Deposit Account No. _____ in the amount of _____ to cover the above fees. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.																		
c. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 15-0030 A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.																		
d. <input type="checkbox"/> Fees are to be charged to a credit card. WARNING: Information on this form may become public. Credit card information should not be included on this form. Provide credit card information and authorization on PTO-2038.																		
NOTE: Where an appropriate time limit under 37 CFR 1.494 or 1.495 has not been met, a petition to revive (37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b)) must be filed and granted to restore the application to pending status.																		
SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:																		
 22850																		
Surinder Sachar Registration No. 34,423																		
 SIGNATURE																		
Norman F. Oblon NAME																		
24,618 REGISTRATION NUMBER																		
March 21 2002 DATE																		

10/088085
Rec'd PCT/PTO 05 JUN 2002
APPLICATION DATA SHEET

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Application Number:: 10/088,085
Application Date:: 03/21/02
Application Type:: REGULAR
Subject Matter:: UTILITY
CD-ROM or CD-R?:: NONE
Title:: METHOD FOR RECYCLING VINYL
POLYMER-BASED ARTICLES (AS
AMENDED)
Attorney Docket Number:: 221021US0PCT

INVENTOR INFORMATION

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Postal or Zip Code of Mailing Address::	<u>B-1120</u>

CORRESPONDENCE INFORMATION

Correspondence Customer Number:: 22850

REPRESENTATIVE INFORMATION

Representative Customer Number:: 22850

DOMESTIC PRIORITY INFORMATION

Application::	Continuity Type::	Parent Application::	Parent Filing Date::
This Application	National Stage of	PCT/EP00/09150	09/18/00

FOREIGN PRIORITY INFORMATION

Application Number:	Country::	Filing Date::	Priority Claimed::
99/12036	France	09/24/99	YES

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Postal or Zip Code of Mailing Address:: B-1050

10/088085

Rec'd PCT/PTO 05 JUN 2002

221021US-0PCT

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT & TRADEMARK OFFICE

IN RE APPLICATION OF:

BERNHARD VANDENHENDE ET AL : ATTN: APPLICATION DIVISION

SERIAL NO: 10/088085 :

FILED: MARCH 21, 2002 : EXAMINER:

FOR: PROCESS FOR RECYCLING :
ARTICLES BASED ON VINYL
POLYMERS

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20231

SIR:

Prior to examination on the merits, please amend the above-identified application as follows.

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as shown in the marked-up copy following this amendment to read as follows.

1. (Amended) Process for recycling an article based on at least one vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymer, according to which:
 - (a) the article is cut up into fragments with a mean size of 1 cm to 50 cm in the case where it would exceed these sizes;
 - (b) the article fragments are brought into contact with an azeotropic or quasiazeotropic mixture of water and of a solvent capable of dissolving the polymer, at a temperature of at least 120°C;

(c) the polymer dissolved in the solvent is precipitated by a reduction in pressure and by injection of steam into the solution thus obtained, which additionally results in the entrainment of the solvent-water azeotrope and thus leaves a mixture remaining which is essentially composed of water and of solid polymer particles;

(d) the polymer particles are collected.

2. (Amended) Process according to Claim 1, wherein the dissolution stage (b) is carried out in a container in which is positioned a perforated rotary drum.

3. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein the solvent is chosen from the group consisting of methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), methyl isobutyl ketone and tetrahydrofuran.

4. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein the dissolution stage (b) is carried out under a pressure of 4 to 10 bar.

5. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein during the dissolution stage (b), the amount of article does not exceed 200 g per litre of solvent.

6. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein before precipitating the dissolved polymer, the possible undissolved constituents are removed at a temperature sufficient to prevent the precipitation of the polymer.

7. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein the precipitation (c) of the polymer is carried out by the joint injection of steam and of liquid water.

8. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein the solvent/water liquid fraction collected on conclusion of the precipitation stage (c) is separated by settling into:

- a first fraction with an azeotropic or quasiazotropic composition, which is reused in the dissolution stage (b);
- a second fraction predominantly of water, which is reused in the precipitation stage (c).

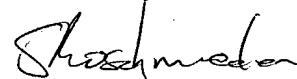
9. (Amended) Process according to claim 1, wherein the article is a sheet.

REMARKS

Claims 1-9 are active in the present application. Claims 2-9 have been amended to remove multiple dependencies and for clarity. Claim 1 has been amended to remove the limitation of pressure in the contact of the article with an azeotropic or quasi-azeotropic mixture. Support for amended Claim 1 is found on page 2 of the specification, lines 3-23. No new matter is believed to have been added by this amendment. An action on the merits and allowance of claims is solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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Marked-Up Copy
Serial No: 101088,085
Amendment Filed on:
6-5-2002

IN THE CLAIMS

--1. (Amended) Process for recycling an article based on at least one vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymer, according to which:

- (a) the article is cut up into fragments with a mean size of 1 cm to 50 cm in the case where it would exceed these sizes;
- (b) the article fragments are brought into contact with an azeotropic or quasiazotropic mixture of water and of a solvent capable of dissolving the polymer, at a temperature of at least 120°C[and at a pressure determined by the temperature in order that, on conclusion of the dissolution stage (b), there is available a mixture comprising, on the one hand, a liquid phase composed of the solvent in which the polymer is dissolved and, on the other hand, the possible undissolved constituents];
- (c) the polymer dissolved in the solvent is precipitated by a reduction in pressure and by injection of steam into the solution thus obtained, which additionally results in the entrainment of the solvent-water azeotrope and thus leaves a mixture remaining which is essentially composed of water and of solid polymer particles;
- (d) the polymer particles are collected.

2. (Amended) Process according to Claim 1, [in which] wherein the dissolution stage (b) is carried out in a container in which is positioned a perforated rotary drum.

3. (Amended) Process according to [either of the preceding claims, in which] claim 1, wherein the solvent is chosen from the group consisting of methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), methyl isobutyl ketone and tetrahydrofuran.

4. (Amended) Process according to [one of the preceding claims, in which] claim 1, wherein the dissolution stage (b) is carried out under a pressure of 4 to 10 bar.

5. (Amended) Process according to [one of the preceding claims, in which,] claim 1, wherein during the dissolution stage (b), the amount of article does not exceed 200 g per litre of solvent.

6. (Amended) Process according to [one of the preceding claims, in which,] claim 1, wherein before precipitating the dissolved polymer, the possible undissolved constituents are removed at a temperature sufficient to prevent the precipitation of the polymer.

7. (Amended) Process according to [one of the preceding claims, in which] claim 1, wherein the precipitation (c) of the polymer is carried out by the joint injection of steam and of liquid water.

8. (Amended) Process according to [one of the preceding claims, in which] claim 1, wherein the solvent/water liquid fraction collected on conclusion of the precipitation stage (c) is separated by settling into:

- a first fraction with an azeotropic or quasiazotropic composition, which is reused in the dissolution stage (b);
- a second fraction predominantly of water, which is reused in the precipitation stage (c).

9. (Amended) Process according to [one of the preceding claims, in which] claim 1, wherein the article is a sheet.--

1/P8/8

Process for recycling articles based
on vinyl polymers

The present invention relates to a process for the recycling of articles based on vinyl polymers, such 5 as vinyl chloride and vinylidene chloride polymers.

These polymers are widely used in the manufacture of varied flexible or rigid articles, such as, for example, tarpaulins, coated fabrics and other components for the interior trim of vehicles, pipes, 10 window frames or electrical cables possessing polymeric insulation.

Intensive grinding of these articles would generally result in a mixture of fine particles with a heterogeneous composition, the purification and the 15 reuse of which would be difficult. In addition, in the case of articles reinforced with fibres (for example polyester fibres), the fibres often form a kind of wadding which greatly complicates the reuse of the ground materials.

20 Various processes based on dissolution by means of organic solvents have already been provided; however, they often present problems of safety and of pollution. In addition, they do not always make it possible to collect plastics with a sufficient purity 25 to make possible an economically advantageous reuse thereof. Another disadvantage of these methods is that they generally result in an extraction of the additives (e.g. plasticizers) present in the vinyl polymers, which goes against a direct reuse of the latter. 30 Finally, these known processes result in very fine polymer particles (of the order of a micron) being obtained, which particles are difficult to filter and to reprocess.

Consequently, the present invention is targeted 35 at providing a recycling process which is simple, economic, safe and not very polluting and which makes it possible to collect plastics with a high purity and

advantageous morphology while substantially preventing the possible additives being extracted therefrom.

More specifically, the present invention relates to a process for recycling an article based on 5 at least one vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymer, according to which:

- (a) the article is cut up into fragments with a mean size of 1 cm to 50 cm in the case where it would exceed these sizes;
- 10 (b) the article fragments are brought into contact with an azeotropic or quasiazeotropic mixture of water and of a solvent capable of dissolving the polymer, at a temperature of at least 120°C;
- 15 (c) the polymer dissolved in the solvent is precipitated by a reduction in pressure and by injection of steam into the solution thus obtained, which additionally results in the entrainment of the solvent-water azeotrope and thus leaves a mixture remaining which is 20 essentially composed of water and of solid polymer particles;
- 25 (d) the polymer particles are collected.

The articles in question can be of any nature, provided that they are essentially composed of one or 25 more vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymers ("VC polymers"). The term "VC polymer" is understood to denote any homo- or copolymer comprising at least 50% by weight of vinyl chloride and/or of vinylidene chloride. Use is generally made of poly(vinyl chloride) 30 (PVC) or poly(vinylidene chloride) (PVDC), that is to say a homopolymer. In addition to one or more VC polymers, the articles can also comprise one or more conventional additives, such as, for example, plasticizers, stabilizers, antioxidants, flame- 35 retardant agents, pigments, fillers, and the like, including reinforcing fibres, for example glass fibres or fibres of an appropriate plastic, such as a polyester.

The articles can be provided in any form, for

example in the form of flexible or rigid pipes, containers, sheets for covering floors, tarpaulins, window frames, insulating sheaths for electrical cables, and the like. They may have been manufactured by any known 5 technique: extrusion, coating, injection moulding and the like.

The articles do not necessarily have to be provided in the form of objects exhibiting a well defined shape; the process also applies to articles in 10 the liquid or pasty state, in particular to sludges collected during the cleaning of plants used for the manufacture of articles from vinyl plastisols. In addition to one or more vinyl chloride polymers, these articles in the liquid or pasty state can also comprise 15 one or more solvents, for example white spirit.

The possible reinforcing fibres can be of any nature, natural or synthetic; use may in particular be made of glass fibres, cellulose fibres or plastic fibres. They are often plastic fibres and in particular 20 polyester fibres. Poly(ethylene terephthalate) (PET) gives good results, in particular in the reinforcing of sheets used as tarpaulins. The diameter of the fibres is usually of the order of 10 to 100 μm . In the reinforced sheets, they are often long fibres, the 25 length of which can reach several metres. However, they can also be shorter fibres, from a few millimetres to a few centimetres in length, optionally forming a woven fabric, a nonwoven fabric or a felt. By way of illustration, the fibres can represent from 1 to 40% of 30 the weight of a reinforced sheet.

The first stage (a) of the process according to the invention consists, if necessary, in cutting up the articles so as to reduce them to fragments with a reduced size which are easy to handle. The mean size of 35 these fragments is preferably at least 2 cm. Furthermore, it is advantageously at most 30 cm. This operation in which the articles are cut up can be carried out by means of any appropriate device, for example by means of grinders with rotating blades or

with shears. It is clear that, if the article is already provided in the form of fragments with appropriate sizes, the stage in which the article is cut up is superfluous. In some cases, it may be of use 5 to subject the article fragments thus obtained to an intermediate separation stage which makes it possible to remove by conventional techniques, such as flotation or electrostatic separation, possible constituents other than vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride 10 polymers.

The article fragments thus obtained are subsequently subjected to the action of a solvent exhibiting several specific characteristics. This operation can be carried out in any appropriate device, 15 taking into account in particular the safety and environmental requirements, for example in a closed reactor exhibiting sufficient chemical resistance. The reaction mixture is preferably stirred. For the purpose of preventing the possible fibres from attaching to the 20 stirring means and from disrupting their operation, an advantageous alternative form consists in carrying out the dissolution in a container in which is positioned a perforated rotary drum rotating at a moderate speed (preferably at less than 100 rev/min). The axis of the 25 drum is preferably approximately horizontal. In the case where the article is reinforced with fibres, an additional advantage of such a device is that, after having extracted most of the solvent from this container, it is possible to rotate the drum at high 30 speed, so as to "spin dry" the fibres which it comprises. The container(s) in which the dissolution and the precipitation are carried out will be described as reactor(s) below.

The solvent used is a substance - or a mixture 35 of substances - capable of dissolving the vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymer or polymers which the treated article comprises. However, in the case where the article is reinforced with fibres, the solvent must not bring about the dissolution of the

reinforcing fibres. Surprisingly, it has been found that it is not essential to restrict the content of water in the solvent to very low values, provided that a sufficient dissolution temperature is used. It is 5 therefore unnecessary to subject the articles to be treated to intensive drying or to provide stages targeted at greatly reducing the content of water in the solvent. For example, if methyl ethyl ketone (MEK) is used as solvent, a temperature of 105° corresponds 10 to an MEK-water azeotrope comprising 15% of water, which constitutes a high content. The disappearance of these constraints is extremely advantageous industrially and economically, given that the drying of the articles can consume considerable energy and that 15 the separation of the water present in the solvent (e.g. in methyl ethyl ketone (MEK)) is a complex operation which requires at least one additional reactor, indeed even a distillation column.

It is necessary, in the context of the process 20 according to the invention, for the solvent used to be miscible with water and to form an azeotrope with water. The solvent is advantageously chosen from methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), methyl isobutyl ketone and tetrahydrofuran. It is preferable to use MEK, which 25 forms an azeotrope with water comprising (at atmospheric pressure) 11% of water and 89% of MEK (by weight).

The fact that an azeotropic or quasiazotropic mixture of water and of solvent is used for the 30 dissolution constitutes, as will be seen below, a considerable simplification, in so far as such a mixture can easily be recovered at the end of the process (for example by a simple separation by settling) and can thus be directly reused. The 35 expression "azeotropic or quasiazotropic mixture" is understood to indicate that the composition of the mixture is not necessarily precisely equal to the composition of the azeotrope but that a slight deviation (e.g. of less than 5%) is acceptable, so as

to take into account, in particular, the variations in the azeotropic composition as a function of the pressure. This is because, as will be set out below, the final stages of the process are carried out at a 5 pressure lower than that prevailing during the dissolution; this implies that the content of water in the water-solvent (azeotropic) mixture collected at the end of the process is somewhat lower than the content of water in the water-solvent azeotrope at the 10 dissolution pressure.

The dissolution (stage b) is carried out under a pressure determined by the temperature. This pressure is generally at least 4 bar. The pressure advantageously does not exceed 10 bar.

15 In addition, it is advantageous to operate under an inert atmosphere, for example under nitrogen, in order to avoid any risk of explosion and of decomposition of the solvent.

The amount of solvent to be used must be chosen 20 so as to prevent the increase in viscosity brought about by the dissolution of the polymer from disrupting the satisfactory progression of the process (filtration, and the like). It is preferable, during the dissolution stage (b), for the amount of article 25 not to exceed 200 g per litre of solvent and in particular 100 g/l.

From the viewpoint of a reuse of the VC polymer thus collected, an advantageous alternative form of the process according to the invention consists in 30 incorporating in the solvent, before or during the stage of dissolution of the polymer, one or more additives (stabilizers, plasticizers, and the like), the natures and the amounts of which are suited to the properties which it is desired to confer on the 35 recycled polymer. It is desirable, in this case, for the additive or additives thus incorporated to be soluble in the solvent used. However, possible insoluble additives can be finely dispersed in the solvent.

On conclusion of the dissolution stage (b), there is available a mixture comprising, on the one hand, a liquid phase composed of the solvent in which the polymer is dissolved and, on the other hand, the 5 possible undissolved constituents, for example reinforcing fibres. The separation of such constituents can be carried out, for example, by filtration using a cloth or screen, the openings of which exhibit sizes of the order of 0.1 to 10 mm. This separation must be 10 carried out at a temperature which is sufficiently high to prevent any premature precipitation of the polymer; to this end, the temperature of the mixture is advantageously maintained at at least 75°C during this separation.

15 In the cases where the article is reinforced with fibres, it is found that the fibres thus recovered are high in purity. In order to increase this purity, the fibres can optionally be subjected to a subsequent stage of centrifuging and/or of washing, for example 20 using the same solvent, for the purpose of removing possible residual traces of polymer. The solvent which would have been used for this washing operation can advantageously be mixed with the fresh solvent used in the dissolution stage; the fact that it comprises 25 traces of dissolved polymer is not detrimental to the effectiveness of the dissolution. The fibres can be reused directly in the manufacture of plastic-based reinforced articles.

30 In addition to possible fibres, this optional separation stage also makes it possible to collect possible "accessories", such as metal eyelets, labels, and the like, incorporated in the article and which would not have been removed therefrom before it was subjected to the process according to the invention. 35 Likewise, possible pieces of metal conductors which would have remained in electrical cable sheaths can also be removed. If necessary, the solvent comprising the dissolved polymer can be filtered more finely for the purpose of removing therefrom possible dusts or

other insoluble particles, for example by using a cloth or screen, the openings of which exhibit sizes of less than 200 μm , preferably less than 20 μm . As indicated above, this separation must also be carried out at a 5 temperature which is sufficiently high to prevent any premature precipitation of the polymer.

Consequently, the present invention relates in particular to a process as described above in which, before precipitating the dissolved polymer, the 10 possible undissolved constituents are removed at a temperature sufficient to prevent the precipitation of the polymer.

After having optionally separated the solid constituents, the dissolved polymer is precipitated 15 (stage c) by reducing the pressure, which generally results in a decrease in the temperature. The reduction in pressure is carried out down to a pressure to which a temperature corresponds which is sufficiently low for the polymer to begin to precipitate, preferably down to atmospheric pressure. Furthermore, steam is injected, 20 into the solvent comprising the dissolved polymer, in an amount sufficient to completely precipitate the dissolved polymer. A large excess of water (steam or liquid) with respect to the azeotropic composition is 25 preferably added. For example, in the case of MEK, from 1 to 3 kg of water per kg of MEK are generally added. The reduction in pressure and the injection of steam precipitate the VC polymer in the form of solid 30 particles (still substantially devoid of additives at this stage), the mean sizes of which are of the order of a micron.

Another effect of the injection of steam is to bring about the evaporation and the entrainment of the water-solvent azeotrope in the gaseous form out of the 35 reactor comprising the solution. This azeotrope can subsequently be collected and condensed. The mixture which remains (which has not been evaporated) is essentially composed of water and of solid polymer particles. As long as the solution still comprises

solvent, the temperature of the gas phase lying above the solution remains approximately equal to the boiling temperature of the azeotrope at the pressure used (by way of example, the evaporation temperature of the 5 MEK-water azeotrope is approximately 73.5°C at atmospheric pressure).

Advantageously, the precipitation of the polymer (stage c) is carried out by the joint injection of steam and of liquid water, which accelerates the 10 precipitation of the polymer. It is not injurious for this water optionally to comprise a low concentration of solvent; this is advantageous in so far as, as set out below, a subsequent stage of the process 15 specifically provides water with a slight charge of solvent, which can thus be reused without specific purification.

As soon as the concentration of solvent in the solution becomes sufficiently low, the additives dissolved in the solution deposit on the polymer 20 particles, which in a highly advantageous way promotes their agglomeration into grains (agglomerates) of the order of 500 µm, which will be very easy to filter, to handle and to reemploy subsequently (in contrast to particles of the order of a micron). Surprisingly, it 25 has been found that these polymer grains (agglomerates) exhibit a highly satisfactory morphology and in particular a particle size which exhibits very little dispersion.

When virtually all the solvent has been 30 entrained, the temperature of the gas phase - just like that of the liquid phase - approaches the boiling temperature of water (at the pressure used during the precipitation), which constitutes an easy means of detecting the virtually complete removal of the 35 solvent.

Once the solution is substantially devoid of solvent, it is, however, advantageous to maintain a high temperature (for example by continuing the injection of steam) for at least a further 5 minutes

and preferably for at least 10 minutes, which surprisingly has a highly favourable influence on the properties and the morphology of the polymer particles (agglomerates) (hardness, particle size, bulk density, 5 porosity, and the like).

A very significant advantage of the removal of the solvent by means of steam is that most of the possible additives present in the treated polymer are not entrained with the solvent and are redeposited on 10 the polymer particles. Consequently, the polymer particles collected on conclusion of the process still comprise a significant fraction of the additives which were initially present in the polymer (at least those of these additives which are soluble in the solvent; 15 this generally does not affect the possible fillers, for example). This situation is particularly advantageous given that these additives are often expensive and that, in addition, the said particles can thus be reused directly in a process for the 20 manufacture of articles based on this polymer. This reuse is facilitated by the fact that the particles thus recovered are pregelled, which simplifies the processing in comparison with the processing of a heterogeneous mixture of polymer granules and of 25 additives added separately. Known processes for recycling by dissolution-precipitation do not exhibit this advantage, in view of the fact that they result in the extraction of the majority of the additives from the polymer.

30 An additional advantage of the injection of steam is that it generally renders superfluous external heating of the reactor in which the process takes place. This advantage is very important industrially: this is because external heating (via the wall of the 35 reactor) would result in polymer encrustations on the wall of the said reactor (caking), requiring it to be frequently cleaned. In contrast, in the process of the invention, the injection of steam allows the wall to be at a lower temperature, which greatly reduces the risks

of caking.

Another advantage of the process of the invention is that the possible emulsifiers which were present in the treated polymer pass into solution in the water and that the polymer particles collected on conclusion of the recycling are consequently substantially devoid of emulsifiers, which facilitates the use thereof; in particular, deposits on the processing plants are avoided, as well as the formation of bubbles at the surface of the novel products thus obtained.

The polymer particles (agglomerates) can then be easily collected (stage d), for example by filtration of the water-particles mixture, and optionally dried before being stored or reused. The residual water is advantageously purified in order to remove the dissolved constituents therefrom, such as emulsifiers or others.

Given the cost of the solvent and the disadvantages which its discharge into the environment might exhibit, it is desirable to recycle the solvent/water liquid fraction (richer in water than the azeotrope) collected on conclusion of the precipitation stage. A significant advantage of the process of the invention is that it is possible to recycle the liquid fraction in a very simple way and to completely reuse it. This is because a simple separation by settling makes it possible to separate the liquid fraction collected into:

- 30 - on the one hand, an (upper) fraction with a (quasi)-azeotropic composition, that is to say predominantly of solvent, comprising approximately 10% of water (the exact content of water depends on the temperature and on the pressure), which can be reused in the dissolution stage;
- 35 - on the other hand, a (lower) fraction predominantly of water (comprising, e.g., of the order of 80% of water), which can be reused in the form of liquid water and/or of steam (after reheating) in the

precipitation stage (surprisingly and advantageously, the presence of a small proportion of solvent is not detrimental).

5 Despite these operations in which water is recycled, an additional contribution of water is generally necessary.

The process according to the invention can be carried out continuously or batchwise, the latter alternative form being preferred.

10 A major advantage of the said process is that it can operate in a closed loop, without polluting discharges being generated, given that both the solvent and the possible agent for separating the solvent-water mixture can be recycled and reused in the process.

15

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURE

The appended figure diagrammatically illustrates in a non-limiting way, the progression of a specific alternative form of the process according to 20 the invention, applied to the recycling of waste electrical cables insulated by a plasticized PVC sheath.

The symbols used have the following meanings:

P: solid polymer
25 S: solvent
(p): dissolved polymer
W: water
A: solvent/water azeotrope
F: possible insoluble constituents
30 STEAM: steam (which can comprise a small proportion of solvent).

The waste is first of all cut up (CUT) (stage a) and then the polymer which it comprises is dissolved (DISS) (stage b) under the effect of the 35 solvent/water azeotropic mixture (A), in which may optionally have been dissolved certain additives which it is desired to incorporate in the polymer. The mixture thus obtained is then filtered (FILT1), which makes it possible to separate the possible insoluble

constituents (F) (metal residues, and the like) from a solution of the polymer in the solvent (S+(p)). The polymer is then precipitated (PREC) (stage c) by injecting steam (STEAM) and optionally liquid water 5 ("W(+S)") (which can comprise a small proportion of solvent) into the solution, which also results in the removal of the solvent-water azeotrope by entrainment. The solid polymer particles P (agglomerates) are separated by filtration (FILT2) (stage d) from the 10 water W, which is advantageously purified before being discharged or reused, and then the particles are dried (DRY). The fraction W+S collected during the separation, which is richer in water than the azeotrope, is condensed (stage not shown) and then 15 separated by settling (SETT), which provides on the one hand, a solvent/water azeotropic fraction (A), which can be reused in the dissolution stage, and, on the other hand, a fraction predominantly of water ("W(+S)"), which can, for example, be reused in the precipitation stage, in the form of steam (STEAM) after 20 a heating stage (H), as well as optionally directly in the liquid form.

CLAIMS

1. Process for recycling an article based on at least one vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymer, according to which:
 - (a) the article is cut up into fragments with a mean size of 1 cm to 50 cm in the case where it would exceed these sizes;
 - (b) the article fragments are brought into contact with an azeotropic or quasiazeotropic mixture of water and of a solvent capable of dissolving the polymer, at a temperature of at least 120°C and at a pressure determined by the temperature in order that, on conclusion of the dissolution stage (b), there is available a mixture comprising, on the one hand, a liquid phase composed of the solvent in which the polymer is dissolved and, on the other hand, the possible undissolved constituents;
 - (c) the polymer dissolved in the solvent is precipitated by a reduction in pressure and by injection of steam into the solution thus obtained, which additionally results in the entrainment of the solvent-water azeotrope and thus leaves a mixture remaining which is essentially composed of water and of solid polymer particles;
 - (d) the polymer particles are collected.
2. Process according to Claim 1, in which the dissolution stage (b) is carried out in a container in which is positioned a perforated rotary drum.
3. Process according to either of the preceding claims, in which the solvent is chosen from methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), methyl isobutyl ketone and tetrahydrofuran.
4. Process according to one of the preceding claims, in which the dissolution stage (b) is carried out under a pressure of 4 to 10 bar.
5. Process according to one of the preceding

claims, in which, during the dissolution stage (b), the amount of article does not exceed 200 g per litre of solvent.

6. Process according to one of the preceding 5 claims, in which, before precipitating the dissolved polymer, the possible undissolved constituents are removed at a temperature sufficient to prevent the precipitation of the polymer.

7. Process according to one of the preceding 10 claims, in which the precipitation (c) of the polymer is carried out by the joint injection of steam and of liquid water.

8. Process according to one of the preceding 15 claims, in which the solvent/water liquid fraction collected on conclusion of the precipitation stage (c) is separated by settling into:

- a first fraction with an azeotropic or quasi-azeotropic composition, which is reused in the dissolution stage (b);
- a second fraction predominantly of water, which is reused in the precipitation stage (c).

9. Process according to one of the preceding claims, in which the article is a sheet.

ABSTRACT

Process for recycling articles based on vinyl polymers

Process for recycling an article based on at least one vinyl chloride or vinylidene chloride polymer, according to which:

- (a) the article is cut up into fragments with a mean size of 1 cm to 50 cm in the case where it would exceed these sizes;
- (b) the article fragments are brought into contact with an azeotropic or quasiazotropic mixture of water and of a solvent capable of dissolving the polymer, at a temperature of at least 120°C;
- (c) the polymer dissolved in the solvent is precipitated by a reduction in pressure and by injection of steam into the solution thus obtained, which additionally results in the entrainment of the solvent-water azeotrope and thus leaves a mixture remaining which is essentially composed of water and of solid polymer particles;
- (d) the polymer particles are collected.

Figure 1.

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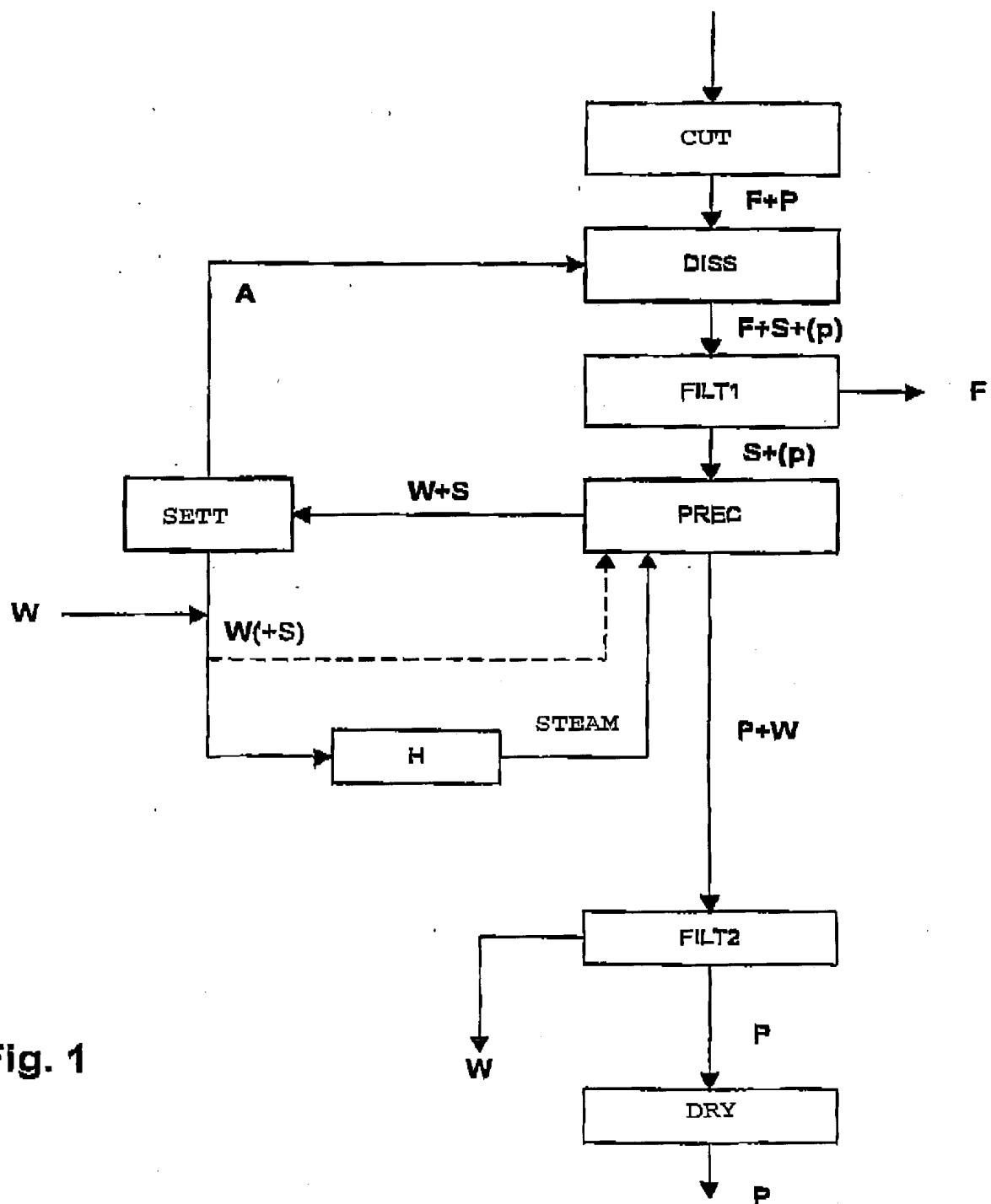


Fig. 1

Declaration and Power of Attorney for Patent Application

Déclaration et Pouvoirs pour Demande de Brevet

French Language Declaration

En tant l'inventeur nommé ci-après, je déclare par le présent acte que:

Mon domicile, mon adresse postale et ma nationalité sont ceux figurant ci-dessous à côté de mon nom:

Je crois être le premier inventeur original et unique (si un seul nom est mentionné ci-dessous), ou l'un des premiers co-inventeurs originaux (si plusieurs noms sont mentionnés ci-dessous) de l'objet revendiqué, pour lequel une demande de brevet a été déposée concernant l'invention intitulée

et dont la description est fournie ci-joint à moins

ci-joint

a été déposée le 18/09/2000

sous le numéro de demande des Etats-Unis ou le numéro de demande international PCT

PCT/EP00/09150 et modifiée le

(le cas échéant).

Je déclare par le présent acte avoir passé en revue et compris le contenu de la description ci-dessus, revendications comprises, telles que modifiées par toute modification dont il aura été fait référence ci-dessus.

Je reconnaiss devoir divulguer toute information pertinente à la brevetabilité, comme défini dans le Titre 37, § 1.56 du Code fédéral des réglementations.

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated next to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

the specification of which:

is attached hereto.

was filed on _____

as United States Application Number or PCT International Application Number

_____ and was amended on

_____ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1.56.

French Language Declaration

Je revendique par le présent acte avoir la priorité étrangère, en vertu du Titre 35, § 119(a)-(d) ou § 365(b) du Code des Etats-Unis, sur toute demande étrangère de brevet ou certificat d'inventeur ou, en vertu du Titre 35, § 365(a) du même Code, sur toute demande internationale PCT désignant au moins un pays autre que les Etats-Unis et figurant ci-dessous et, en cochant la case, j'ai aussi indiqué ci-dessous toute demande étrangère de brevet, tout certificat d'inventeur ou toute demande internationale PCT ayant une date de dépôt précédant celle de la demande à propos de laquelle une priorité est revendiquée.

I hereby claim foreign priority under Title 35, United States Code, § 119(a)-(d) or § 365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or § 365(a) of any PCT International application which designated at least one country other than the United States, listed below, and have also identified below, by checking the box, any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or PCT International application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

Prior Foreign Application(s)
Demande(s) de brevet antérieure(s) dans un autre pays.

<u>99.12036</u>	<u>Belgique</u>
(Number) (Numéro)	(Country) (Pays)
<hr/>	<hr/>
(Number) (Numéro)	(Country) (Pays)

<u>Priority claimed</u> <u>Droit de priorité revendiquée</u>	
<u>24/09/1999</u> (Day/Month/Year Filed) (Jour/Mois/Anné de dépôt)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes Oui	No Non
<hr/>	
<u>(Day/Month/Year Filed)</u> <u>(Jour/Mois/Anné de dépôt)</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes Oui	No Non

Je revendique par le présent acte tout bénéfice, en vertu du Titre 35, § 119(e) du Code des Etats-Unis, de toute demande de brevet provisoire effectuée aux Etats-Unis et figurant ci-dessous.

<u>(Application No.)</u> <u>(Nº de demande)</u>	<u>(Filing Date)</u> <u>(Date de dépôt)</u>
--	--

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

<u>(Application No.)</u> <u>(Nº de demande)</u>	<u>(Filing Date)</u> <u>(Date de dépôt)</u>
--	--

Je revendique par le présent acte tout bénéfice, en vertu du Titre 35, § 120 du Code des Etats-Unis, de toute demande de brevet effectuée aux Etats-Unis, ou en vertu du Titre 35, § 365(c) du même Code, de toute demande internationale PCT désignant les Etats-Unis et figurant ci-dessous et, dans la mesure où l'objet de chacune des revendications de cette demande de brevet n'est pas divulgué dans la demande antérieure américaine ou internationale PCT, en vertu des dispositions du premier paragraphe du Titre 35, § 112 du Code des Etats-Unis, je reconnais devoir divulguer toute information pertinente à la brevetabilité, comme défini dans le Titre 37, § 1.56 du Code fédéral des réglementations, dont j'ai pu disposer entre la date de dépôt de la demande antérieure et la date de dépôt de la demande nationale ou internationale PCT de la présente demande:

<u>PCT/EP00/09150</u>	<u>18/09/2000</u>
(Application No.) (Nº de demande)	(Filing Date) (Date de dépôt)

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 120 of any United States application(s), or § 365(c) of any PCT International application designating the United States, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT International filing date of this application.

<u>(Application No.)</u> <u>(Nº de demande)</u>	<u>(Filing Date)</u> <u>(Date de dépôt)</u>
--	--

<u>breveté</u> (Status) (patented, pending, abandoned) (Statut) (breveté, en cours d'examen, abandonné)	
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<u>(Status) (patented, pending, abandoned)</u> (Statut) (breveté, en cours d'examen, abandonné)	
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Je déclare par le présent acte que toute déclaration ci-incluse est, à ma connaissance, vérifique et que toute déclaration formulée à partir de renseignements ou de suppositions est tenue pour vérifique; et de plus, que toutes ces déclarations ont été formulées en sachant que toute fausse déclaration volontaire ou son équivalent est passible d'une amende ou d'une incarcération, ou des deux, en vertu de la Section 1001 du Titre 18 du Code des Etats-Unis, et que de telles déclarations volontairement fausses risquent de compromettre la validité de la demande de brevet ou du brevet délivré à partir de celle-ci.

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

French Language Declaration

POUVOIRS: En tant que l'inventeur cité, je désigne par la présente l'(les) avocat(s) et/ou agent(s) suivant(s) pour qu'ils poursuive(nt) la procédure de cette demande de brevet et traite(nt) toute affaire s'y rapportant avec l'Office des brevets et des marques: (mentionner le nom et le numéro d'enregistrement).

POWER OF ATTORNEY: As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith: (list name and registration number)

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30

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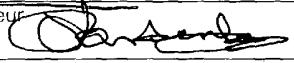
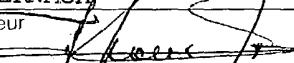
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(Supply similar information and signature for third and subsequent joint inventors.)